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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001789

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR
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STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: THE ROLE OF THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS

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11. Sensitive but unclassified - please protect accordingly.

12. Summary: (SBU) Joseph Jasmin, a member of President Preval's Lespwa party and former deputy, serves as minister of parliamentary relations. The Preval administration created the position in hopes of improving the tumultuous relations with parliament that marked Preval's previous presidency. Jasmin served primarily as a sounding board for parliamentary criticism of the executive during the first legislative session that ended on September 30, and has yet to produce any coordinated legislation. Jasmin believes, however, that parliament is ready to "find its own path" after considering the proposals the executive recently submitted along with the budget. He recognizes that many parliamentarians lack experience and resources and advocates on their behalf for both material and technical assistance with the executive. Jasmin's work demonstrates a commitment on the part of Preval and Prime Minister Alexis to bolster the parliament and promote cooperation. His position is extra extra-constitutional, however, and the GoH has not appointed the committee on parliamentary-executive relations called for by the constitution. End Summary.

13. (U) Jasmin is the minister responsible for the relations between the executive and the legislative branches. President Preval and Prime Minister Alexis announced their intention to create this new cabinet position prior to taking office, as part of their efforts to decentralize power and promote the constitutional role of the legislature. Deep divisions and resentment prevailed between the parliament and the executive during the first Preval administration (1996-2001), parliament never formally approved Alexis, first nomination as prime minister in March, 1999, and the latter served out his tenure by executive decree. Alexis placed particular emphasis on improving his reputation with the legislature prior to parliamentary approval of his most recent nomination as prime minister. Jasmin keeps his office down the hall from Alexis, at the PM,s office complex (the Primature), and Alexis stated publicly that Jasmin,s position is integral to his government and that his appointment demonstrates the executive's commitment to the parliament.

¶4. (U) Minister Jasmin told Poloff on September 13 that his goal is "to harmonize the relationship between the two powers of the nation for the benefit of the population," but underscored that the legislature is an independent and autonomous body. He is additionally interested in educating the public on the role of parliament and stimulating debate among civil society on proposed legislation. To accomplish this goal, Minister Jasmin often discusses issues raised in parliament on radio programs and in his meetings with civil society.

¶5. (U) Minister Jasmin attends parliamentary sessions when a minister appears before either chamber or when he needs to transmit information to the legislators from the executive. If a minister is called before either chamber, Jasmin often goes to parliament before the minister's appearance to work on the more difficult issues so that the parliamentarians and the convoked minister can focus on more substantive issues, as opposed to details. He does not have a regular meeting schedule but meets "often" with the presidents of each chamber. He hopes to set up regular meetings between the president, the prime minister and the parliamentarians. To date, they only meet on urgent matters. Regular meetings, in his view, are integral to an effective dialogue between the branches to avoid "unnecessary conflict."

¶6. (U) Jasmin explained that the parliament should work with the executive to create a legislative agenda. The executive will consider the parliamentarians, legislative goals but give priority to executive initiatives. The resulting agenda should still represent a compromise. The legislators can also propose their own laws, which Jasmin coins their "legislative function" differing from their "programming function," in tandem with the executive. Jasmin said that while parliament proposed no laws during parliament's first session, some were "in the works." The parliament's current

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priorities are pushing the president to curb the insecurity, improving the country's fiscal health, and decentralization. He believes that both chambers are doing a commendable job. The parliamentarians are "in the process of finding their own path and organizing their work." They should soon move toward a weekly calendar or regular legislative debate. (Note: The executive's legislative proposals were presented simultaneously with the budget to parliament on September 13. End Note.)

¶7. (U) Jasmin stressed that the parliament lacks resources, both human and material. He aims to hire specialists to train parliamentarians how to analyze and draft legislation. Additionally, he arranged the turnover of two government buildings near the legislative palace for use as additional parliamentary office space and is working with the legislators to have them refurbished and outfitted.

Biographical Information: -----

¶8. (U) Jasmin was a former deputy (1995-1999) for the Eskanp party, which was aligned with Famni Lavalas. Eskanp is one of the parties that merged to form the Lespwa party in early 2005 to support Preval's candidacy. As a deputy, Jasmin was a part of parliament's "anti-neoliberal block" and was quite vocal about his disdain for the privatization of Haiti's public enterprises. The anti-neoliberals also harshly criticized Preval's attempts to implement an IMF adjustment package. As Preval's chief implementer, Alexis took much of that criticism. Jasmin is a lawyer and founding member of Groupe d'Assistance Juridique, a legal aid group in Cap Haitien. Jasmin is married and has three daughters and one son. Jasmin is not an English speaker.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: Jasmin's position is extra-constitutional. The constitution does address

parliamentary-executive relations, calling for a five-member committee to intervene in the event of irresolvable differences between the two branches. Jasmin claims the GoH cannot appoint the committee because the president of the CEP, one of the statutory members, is currently provisional. As a member of the cabinet, Jasmin could not, presumably, carry out the mediation that the constitution envisioned for the standing independent committee. For the moment, as parliament continues to function in a subservient manner to the presidency, the parliament will have to make do with a member of the executive serving as its principal advocate.

End Comment.

SANDERSON